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AUTHOR Findlen, George L.
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ABSTRACT

Despite common beliefs that technical college students do not wish to, and cannot, transfer to four-year institutions, many studies have found the opposite to be true. Research shows that 26% of students enrolled in vocational programs intend to transfer to a baccalaureate institution, and occupational course credits from technical colleges are often transferable. It is individual state policy that inhibits course transfer. For example, in Wisconsin, a program-to-program articulation agreement between individual technical colleges and universities is required. Studies on transfer from Western Wisconsin Technical College (WWTC) to the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse (UWLC) shows that such a policy is restrictive and detrimental to transfer students. Technical colleges should follow the example of comprehensive community colleges and broaden their mission to include transfer, creating articulation agreements with state universities. In addition, states should adopt a university system policy that permits students to transfer their course work wherever appropriate. Restrictive state policies such as Wisconsin's program-to-program policy should be lifted to better serve the needs of future students. (Contains 15 references, transfer research guidelines, and research findings from WWTC and UWLC.) (YKH)

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Technical Colleges and College Transfer—One More Time

George L. Findlen

Western Wisconsin Technical College

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Technical Colleges and College Transfer – One More Time

Refereed Article

By: George L. Findlen

ATEA Journal - December 1997 - January 1998

Occupational faculty and administrators in technical colleges have long believed that (a) students who come to them do not intend to transfer, wanting only job training, (b) program completers do not transfer, going directly into employment, (c) occupational coursework does not transfer, since it is "terminal education," and (d) technical colleges should do nothing to make transfer possible, since that would destroy the technical colleges' unique character. Research published in the past five years disproves the first three beliefs. To avoid irrelevancy, occupational faculty and administrators must change their view about transfer and the technical colleges' mission just as faculty and administrators of junior colleges did two decades ago.

Recently, I explained changes in the North Central Association's 1994-96 accreditation standards to a group of administrators. After I pointed out that NCA now expected General Education faculty at all two-year colleges to have graduate degrees in the field they teach since students increasingly want those courses to transfer to baccalaureate institutions (North Central Association, 1993), one of those present said, "But people who come here just want to get a job."

Several weeks later, I explained to a colleague that the nearby state university recently had created a course equivalency list for our technical college General Education courses and theirs. One of the effects of the list apparently will be that students not accepted to the university will come to our technical college in the hope of raising their grade point average to qualify for admission to the university. My colleague said, "That makes me wonder if we are still a technical college!"

Beliefs

I heard several beliefs in those two comments.

1. Students who come to technical colleges do not want to transfer their courses to four-year colleges. They come instead to take non-transfer courses to enter—and stay—in the job market. Their educational goal is terminal job preparation, and they will not return to higher education once they complete that preparation.
2. Technical college courses do not transfer. Only university courses transfer.
3. If any students do want to transfer to a four-year college, they are in the clear minority and need not be accommodated.

Facts

Published research in recent years closely examines these beliefs. Technical college faculty and administrators and occupational faculty members and administrators in community colleges should review that research.

Do students who come to technical colleges want to transfer? The answer is "yes." James Palmer's 1987 dissertation study at the University of California at Los Angeles queried 7,558 students enrolled in 95 randomly selected two-year colleges throughout the US. He discovered that 26% of the students enrolled in vocational programs intended to transfer to a baccalaureate institution. One fourth of the occupational enrollment saying they plan to transfer is substantial enough to conclude that, yes indeed, many students who come to technical colleges plan to transfer. Occupational program students know that more education will help them advance in the workplace and intend to get more higher education.

Technical college faculty and staff may think occupational students do not want to transfer because those students frequently say, "Oh, I just want to get a better job." However, faculty hear the same goal at the four-year level as well. A study by Astin, Green, Korn, Schalit, and Berz (1988) for the Cooperative Institutional Research Program found that 86% of entering two-year college students enrolled to "get a better job," while 81% of entering four-year college students enrolled for the same reason. The research also found that 80% of entering two-year college students and 75% of beginning four-year college students said they were in college to "make more money." Occupational program students in two-year colleges do not differ from their baccalaureate counterparts when it comes to wanting the economic security which accompanies more education. Preparing for work and preparing for more education has been the role of the of the two-year college since its beginning (Cohen, 1990).

Do occupational program courses from technical colleges transfer? The answer is "yes." The Center for the Study of Community Colleges conducted a study in 1991 of "the extent to which courses classified as occupational are accepted for transfer at four-year institutions" (Cohen and Ignash, 1993, p. 69). The study involved 164 two-year colleges in California, Florida, Illinois, North Carolina, and Texas. Researchers found that 41.6% of all vocational courses in Texas, 61.7% of all vocational courses in California, and 80.4 % of all vocational courses in Illinois do transfer to a comprehensive state university from a two-year college. Eaton's separate analysis (1994) concluded the study "does confirm that non-liberal arts course work is routinely transferable" (p. 74).

The claim that occupational courses do not transfer is more accurate, however, in a state with a restrictive policy. In Wisconsin, transferability from Wisconsin Technical College System institutions to University of Wisconsin institutions is controlled by the University of Wisconsin System policy. That policy permits UW campuses to accept occupational courses from technical colleges only if they are part of a program-to-program articulation agreement between a single technical college and a single institution in the university system (Office of Academic Affairs, 1995). If students who transfer under the terms of the program-to-program articulation agreement change major or move to a different UW institution that does not have a program-to-program articulation agreement with the WTCS institution in the same program, they lose credit for all

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occupational courses they initially transferred (Office of Academic Affairs, 1990). If a student does not transfer under one of the program-to-program articulation agreements, the university will accept only fifteen credits of general education coursework. Prior to January 1996, the UW system required a completed AAS degree before accepting any of the originating technical college's fifteen general education credits. Students who transferred without the completed AAS degree had to repeat general education courses they had already taken. It is policy, not the content of the courses, which prevents more technical college occupational courses from transferring to universities in Wisconsin.

Are students in technical colleges who do transfer eventually a clear minority? Is their number so small as not to justify articulation efforts? The answer to both questions is "no." The State University of New York (SUNY) system includes both two-year colleges and four-year colleges. New York is one of the few states to track students by degree type. In 1975-1976, 5,657 students transferred from a two-year institution to a four-year institution; 3,415 (60.4%) had Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degrees, while 2,242 (39.6%) had Associate of Applied Science or Associate of Occupational Studies degrees. Seven years later in 1982-1983, 4,445 students transferred from a two-year program to a four-year program; 2,146 (48.3%) had AA or AS degrees, while 2,299 (51.7%) had AAS or AOS degrees (Bader-Borel, 1984). Although the total number of transfers is down—a complex phenomenon examined at length by W. Norton Grubb (1991)—the number of students holding associate degrees in occupational areas who transfer has held steady, making them the majority of students who transfer. Cohen (1990) cites statistics from four other states where occupational student transfer rates range from 11% to 40%. Other scholars have noted this major shift (Clark, 1990), one referring to the AAS is "the other transfer degree" (Prager, 1988).

In sum, many two-year occupational students intend on transferring, many of them do transfer, and many of their occupational courses transfer as well. In states where policies are not restrictive, it is not only liberal arts "transfer" students and their courses which transfer.

Opinions

In my two colleagues' remarks, I heard more than simple beliefs that can be answered with facts. I also heard one belief representing a deeply held bias and a second belief representing fear of change.

4. General Education faculty who have master's degrees in field (instead of bachelor's degrees in field) are not appropriate as technical college faculty since they too often lack understanding of working people's learning styles, skill to deal with their learning needs, and respect for their job skills.
5. Technical colleges which perform the functions universities perform—like making their courses transferable—lose their identity and purpose. Thus, they should be prohibited from doing anything which universities do. Moreover, the North Central Association (NCA), the Midwest's regional accrediting body, should not require that technical colleges hire faculty with credentials to make transferability possible, and technical colleges should not accept students who have that intention.

Reasons

These views cannot be answered with facts, but they can be examined.

Are graduate degreed General Education faculty a poor choice for teaching occupational students? Do they lack basic attitudes essential to teach in occupational programs? One answer comes from research done on education production functions in public schools. Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine (1996) found that, when resource variables like number of years of education is compared to student achievement on objective tests, the relationship is positive. There is no reason for believing the same is not true in technical colleges. Thus, having faculty with a master's degree in field should be desired to make higher student achievement more likely. It is a truism that more degrees do not guarantee better teaching skill; however, it is equally true that fewer degrees do not guarantee it either.

When technical college administrators hire general education faculty who have little sensitivity or commitment to preparing occupational students for the job market or who have little demonstrable teaching skill with a wide divergence of learning styles and abilities, they deserve the criticism described above. Administrators have an obligation to assure that all faculty are hired with teaching skill and continue to develop it throughout their teaching careers. It does not matter whether those faculty teach general education or occupational courses, whether they work in comprehensive community colleges or in technical colleges focusing on preparing students for immediate job entry. All need teaching skill with a wide diversity of talents and abilities.

Should technical colleges have nothing to do with students bound for the university or with making transfer possible? Will facilitating occupational student transfers dilute the technical college's mission and identity? The answer comes in part from the junior colleges of the early 1960's. They had the transfer function as their sole mission. Today, few of them still function as junior colleges. Almost all have become comprehensive community colleges serving all five of these basic functions: basic education, transfer education, occupational education, continuing education, and personal life enrichment. The same is true of technical colleges. In recent years, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Arkansas, and Minnesota have merged their technical colleges with their community colleges, have put them in the same system, or have broadened their missions. Just as the single-mission, transfer-only junior college was too narrowly focused, the same is true of the single-mission, job-training-only technical college. Students want their occupational programs to enable them to get a job, and they want that education to enable them to pursue baccalaureate education later.

The Future

Technical colleges and the states with technical college systems have a choice.

They can hold on to the past and risk becoming a dinosaur (Findlen, 1994), or they can make those changes which will enable them to join the future. For technical colleges, that future involves following the example of comprehensive community colleges and reaching out to state universities to develop articulation agreements for occupational program students as well as for liberal arts students. For the states with technical college systems, that future involves adopting a university system policy which permits students to transfer their course work wherever appropriate. The sole determinant of acceptability should be whether the receiving institution has an equivalent course and the faculty who teach it are willing to give credit for the sending institution's course on the basis of that equivalency. With such a policy, students will be able to move from one level of institution to another, from one program to another, with minimal loss of credit, and the door will be open for students to move up the career ladder in due time should they wish to.

The strongest argument for this proposed change comes from the career paths of two technical college graduates. Both have developed themselves and are making significant contributions to society—including paying higher taxes—because they have had the opportunity to transfer their occupational AAS course work to a state university campus for their next degree.

My first example started his career as a carpenter's helper, carrying lumber and other building supplies at home construction sites. One day, he observed a house framing crew chief turn a blueprint every which way, apparently unable to interpret some of its symbols. My colleague thought to himself, "I can learn that," and enrolled in a Blueprint Reading class at a local community college (which started as a trade school). There, he saw people at tables creating those blueprints. Before long, he had an AAS in Architectural Drafting, became a crew chief at construction sites, and eventually started his own home construction firm. One day, he received a phone call inviting him to stand in for a carpentry instructor at the local community college where he had earned his AAS some years earlier. That led to his becoming a faculty member there. When he was denied promotion some years later, he enrolled in a state university, completing a BS in construction management by correspondence study, followed that with an MS in administration at yet another state university nearby, and moved directly into an EdD in vocational-technical-occupational education. He has since become an industrial technology dean at two comprehensive community colleges, published papers on program review and faculty job satisfaction, taught graduate management courses, and served as a regional accreditation consultant-evaluator. This year, he began applying for a vice presidency at a comprehensive community college.

My second example started her career wanting to work as a retail clerk, so she enrolled in a technical college fashion marketing program, completing an AAS. That experience wet her appetite for more, and she went on to a state university where she completed a BS in Marketing and Distributive Education. She taught marketing education in a high school then at a technical college. She eventually completed an MA and a PhD in Continuing and Adult Education. She recently left a research university, where she taught marketing education, to serve as the dean of a Business division at a medium-sized technical college. Her publication record, which covers six single-spaced typed pages, would get her tenure at any land grant university, and she remains active in professional associations, serving on executive committees, serving as proposal reviewer, and chairing sessions at state and national meetings.

Admittedly, these two examples are atypical. Careers like these should not be the goal of occupational programs, but they should be possible for all who want them. If we are to be committed to the fullest development of everyone's talents, we must work to remove artificial barriers imposed by restrictive state policies and let each receiving institution determine which courses are equivalent to theirs, regardless of type (general education or occupational). As Cohen and Ignash (1994) put it, "the concept of 'terminal education' should be laid to rest" (p. 29). To this, technical college faculty members and administrators and their occupational colleagues in comprehensive community colleges should say a loud "Amen."

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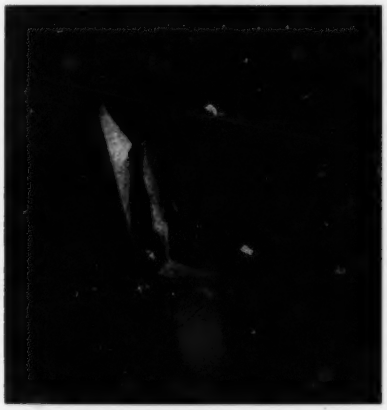
George L. Findlen is Dean, General Education, Western Wisconsin Technical College, LaCrosse, WI.

Distinguished Service Award

Arthur Beasley, was the Dean of Vocational-Technical Education at Jones County Jr. College in Ellisville, MS. He retired last December. Arthur has been a member of ATEA since 1980—he became one of the first life members. He was very active in the MRGR Region, serving on the Regional Council and all of the offices, including the president of the region. He was instrumental in writing the bylaws for the region and also for updating the National ATEA bylaws.



Mr. Beasley was presented the Distinguished Service award during the Mississippi River and Gulf Regional Conference in Memphis, TN, on October 31, 1997—Arthur Beasley has been a strong supporter of Technical Education and ATEA. He intends to remain active in ATEA.

Technical Education Loses a Great Friend

Our sympathy to the family of Dr. Winifred Warnat, US Department of Education, who passed away in September. Winnie will be missed by all of her friends and colleagues in technical education.

TRANSFER FROM WESTERN WISCONSIN TECHNICAL COLLEGE

TO THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN AT LA CROSSE,

SPRING 1997 THROUGH SPRING 1998

Findings

1. How many students transfer to UW-L from WWTC each year? Is that number stable or increasing?

The number of students who transfer has increased substantially, jumping from 8 and 9 in 91-92 to 51 and 65 in 97-98. That is a six-fold increasing in the fall, a seven-fold increase in the spring.

Term/Year	# Transfering	Term/Year	# Transfering
Fall 91	8	Spring 92	9
Fall 92	7	Spring 93	17
Fall 93	8	Spring 94	15
Fall 94	17	Spring 95	7
Fall 95	14	Spring 96	7
Fall 96	30	Spring 97	42
Fall 97	51	Spring 98	65

2. Where do students who transfer from WWTC to UW-L start their higher education careers?

Term	WWTC Starts	% Starting at WWTC
Spring 97	32	80
Fall 97	40	75
Spring 98	48	73

I had expected to find a large number starting at UW-L, coming to WWTC to build up a grade point average, then returning to UW-L. Only 2 students in the three semester's started at UW-L, came to WWTC, and returned to UW-L. All others who did not start at WWTC started elsewhere, came to WWTC, and only then moved on to UW-L. So it is not the case that students start at UW-L and use us to improve their gpa.

3. Are many of the students who transfer from WWTC to UW-L part of program-to-program articulation agreements?

Term	Number Taking Occup. Courses	Total Transferred
Spring 97	0	0
Fall 97	4	5
Spring 98	2	4

No. Very few are. None of the spring 1997 group had courses accepted by UW-L from the seven programs that are articulated. In the fall 1997 group, four (8%) of the 53 had courses from articulated programs: three of the four had one or more accounting courses while the fourth had a business administration course accepted from WWTC. In the spring 1998 group, two (3%) transferred occupational courses. All other courses by all students are among the 15 general education courses that UW system policy permits to transfer.

4. Of those who transfer from WWTC to UW-L, do any seem interested in transfer only?

To answer that, I looked at three statistics: (a) the proportion transferring after taking 15 or fewer credits at WWTC, (b) the number of students who were part of a program-to-program articulation agreement, and (c) the proportion of transferring students who took four courses that meet UW-L general education requirements. An examination of all three leads me to conclude that upwards of 50 students per semester come to WWTC for the sole purpose of preparing to transfer to UW-L.

(a) Term/Year	% Taking 15 or Fewer
Spring 97	19%
Fall 97	55%
Spring 98	54%

These students only rarely take courses other than General Education.

(b) See the answer to question 3 above: very few transfers are due to program-to-program agreements.

(c) Term/Year	% Taking 4	% Taking 3	% Taking 3 or 4
Spring 97	50%	22%	72%
Fall 97	32%	25%	57%
Spring 98	29%	27%	56%

A substantial proportion of transferring students took three or four General Education courses at WWTC which fulfill a general education requirement at UW-L (Written Communication, Speech, Introduction to Sociology, and Introduction to Psychology).

Most remarkable was the number of students (46%) who attended WWTC for a single semester (fall 1997) and then transferred to UW-L immediately.

5. How do students who transfer to UW-L fare when they get there?

Students from the spring 1997 group who did not withdraw from all classes spring the spring semester (36 of 40) received a 2.27 grade point average in their UW-L work. Clustering grade point averages at UW-L gets us the following: 10 got a 3.0 or better, 15 got between a 2.0 and 2.99, and 15 got below a 2.0.

Conclusions

1. Students treat WWTC no differently than other colleges and universities. Some come to WWTC to prepare to transfer; others come to WWTC and choose to go elsewhere after exploring a program; yet others come to WWTC and stay through the completion of a program.

2. Put another way, from 50 to 60 students per semester ignore our mission and come to us as they would a community college.

3. The program-to-program mechanism as the vehicle for permitting and fostering transfer does not work. An examination of last declared program at WWTC and of the initially declared major at UW-L suggests why: students change their minds about what they want to study.

4. Current UW system policy, which permits UW institutions to accept only 15 credits of General Education coursework has two effects on students. One, they are forced to transfer after only one semester. That is not in WWTC's best interests. Two, they must lose much of the credit they earned at WWTC if they stay at WWTC for more than one semester. That is not in the students' best interests.

Written Oct 97
Revised Feb 98
Rewritten Mar 98

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM UNDERGRADUATE TRANSFER POLICY

"UW institutions should work with WTCS districts to identify areas where Associate Degree programs have direct relationships with Baccalaureate Degree programs. Where program relationships are found to exist, transfer articulation agreements are encouraged....Under these articulations, students in certain WTCS Association Degree programs who enroll in a related UW Baccalaureate Degree program may be able to transfer related occupational and technical credits. These credits may transfer to other UW institutions only if a similar credit transfer or articulation agreement exists."

D.C.3.

Source: ACIS 6.0 revised 12-8-95

BASIS FOR A GOOD TRANSFER POLICY

1. Equivalent content

2. Approved by faculty at receiving institution.

3. No unique requirements for one system or state.

TRANSFER RESEARCH

Belief: Two-year college occupational courses do not transfer.

Fact: Two-year college occupational courses do transfer:

41% in Texas
61.7% in California
80.4% in Illinois

Source: Arthur M. Cohen and Jan M. Ignash, "The Scope and Transferability of Occupational Courses in the Two-Year College," Community College Review, 21 (Winter 1993), 72-74.

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN SYSTEM UNDERGRADUATE TRANSFER POLICY

"UW institutions may accept in transfer up to fifteen (15) WTCS non-college parallel general education credits" [100-level 801 & 809 only] (V.C.2.).

Source: A CIS 6.0 revised 12-8-95

TRANSFER RESEARCH

Belief: Students enrolled in two-year college occupational courses never intend to transfer.

Fact: 26% of all first-time college students enrolled in a two-year college occupational course indicate that their primary reason for being there is to prepare to transfer to a four-year college.

Source: James C. Palmer. The Characteristics and Education Objectives of Students Served by Community College Vocational Curricula. Dissertation Abstracts Internationals 48 (11), 2794A. Palmer surveyed 7,558 students enrolled in 95 randomly selected two-year colleges in 1987.

TRANSFER RESEARCH

Belief: Students who enroll in two-year occupational programs never do transfer to four-year colleges.

Fact: A majority (51%) of the transfers from public two-year to public four-year colleges in the state of New York in 1983 had an occupational (A.A.S. or A.O.S.) degree.

Source: Phillis Bader-Berel, ed. Compilation of Statistical Data Concerning the Community Colleges of the State of New York, 1983-1984 (Albany: Office for Community Colleges, Office of Institutional Research and Planning, and Office of Finance and Business, State University of New York, 1984), p. 165.

DO NOT ASK FOR

- UW institutions to grant junior status to those who transfer with a completed A.A.S. degree, regardless of program.

- UW institutions to accept all WTCS occupational courses, regardless of subject.

- UW institutions to accept post-secondary 300 level or pre-collegiate GOAL courses.

DO ASK FOR

The UW system to

- Lift the 15 credit limit on General Education courses

- Accept Math and Science courses where appropriate

- Permit each UW institution to decide what WTCS courses to accept
    - Based on comparable course content
    - Based on faculty approval at the receiving institution

- Remove the requirement that there be a program-to-program articulation agreement as a condition for transferring occupational courses from a WTCS institution to a UW institution.